

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Rodney R. Page, #266042,)	C/A No. 3:09-2199-MBS-JRM
)	
Petitioner,)	
)	
v.)	
)	
)	
Cecelia Reynolds,)	Report and Recommendation
)	
Respondent.)	
)	

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of this *pro se* petition pursuant to the Rules Governing Section 2254 Proceedings for the United States District Court, the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), Pub. L. No. 104-132, 110 Stat. 1214, and other habeas corpus statutes. The review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr.*, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995); and *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983).

This Court is required to liberally construe *pro se* documents. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976). Such *pro se* documents are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a petition filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89 (2007); *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 5, 9 (1980). Even under this less stringent standard, however, this *pro se* petition is subject to summary dismissal. The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore

a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Serv.*, 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990).

Background

Petitioner entered a guilty plea to the charge of Assault and Battery of a High and Aggravated Nature on December 17, 2008, in the Lexington County Court of General Sessions. Petitioner was sentenced to ten (10) years incarceration, suspended to five (5) years incarceration and five (5) years probation. Petitioner indicates that he did not file a direct appeal, however, he did file an application for post-conviction relief (PCR) in June of 2009.¹ Petitioner states that he has “received no response” to date regarding his PCR action. Petitioner claims that he has appealed his conviction to the highest state court having jurisdiction. *See* Petitioner’s habeas petition, page six (6), question eleven (11)(d). However, Petitioner’s answer to question fifteen (15) of the habeas petition reveals that Petitioner’s PCR action is still pending.

Discussion

Petitioner’s habeas action under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 should be dismissed because Petitioner has not exhausted his state court remedies. With respect to his convictions and sentence, a petitioner's sole federal remedies are a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2241 and a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254, which can be sought only after the petitioner has exhausted his state court remedies. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b); *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. 270 (1971). The requirement that state remedies must be exhausted before filing a federal habeas corpus action is

¹

The Lexington County Eleventh Judicial Circuit Public Index indicates that a Post Conviction Relief action was filed by a Rodney Return Page on June 11, 2009. The index lists the PCR action’s status as “active” and provides the following Case Action Number: 2009CP3202715. *See* <http://www.lex-co.com/applications/scjdweb/PublicIndex/>.

found in the statute, 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1), which provides that “[a]n application for a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court shall not be granted unless it appears that (A) the applicant has exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the State.”

The exhaustion requirement is “grounded in principles of comity; in a federal system, the States should have the first opportunity to address and correct alleged violations of state prisoner’s federal rights.” *Coleman v. Thompson*, 501 U.S. 722, 731 (1991). The United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, in *Matthews v. Evatt*, 105 F.3d 907 (4th Cir. 1997), found that “a federal habeas court may consider only those issues which have been ‘fairly presented’ to the state courts. . . . To satisfy the exhaustion requirement, a habeas petitioner must fairly present his claim to the state’s highest court. The burden of proving that a claim has been exhausted lies with the petitioner.” *Id.* at 911 (citations omitted).² Because further review of Petitioner’s conviction and sentence is currently pending, the grounds Petitioner could raise in a § 2254 petition have not been exhausted. *See In Re Exhaustion of State Remedies in Criminal and Post-Conviction Relief Cases*, 471 S.E.2d 454 (S.C. 1990) (“[W]hen the claim has been presented to the Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court, and relief has been denied, the litigant shall be deemed to have exhausted all available state remedies”). *See also State v. McKennedy*, 559 S.E.2d 850 (S.C. 2002).

² Where a habeas petitioner has failed to exhaust his state remedies and the state court would now find his claims procedurally barred, further exhaustion is not required. *See Coleman v. Thompson*, 501 U.S. 722 735 n.1 (1991). However, the federal court is precluded from hearing a procedurally defaulted claim unless the petitioner “can demonstrate cause for the default and actual prejudice as a result of the alleged violation of federal law, or demonstrate that failure to consider the claims will result in a fundamental miscarriage of justice.” *Id.* at 750.

Since the Petitioner has a viable state court remedy which has not been fully utilized, the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina should not keep this case on its docket while the petitioner is exhausting his state remedies. *See Galloway v. Stephenson*, 510 F. Supp. 840, 846 (M.D.N.C. 1981)("When state court remedies have not been exhausted, absent special circumstances, a federal habeas court may not retain the case on its docket, pending exhaustion, but should dismiss the petition"). *See also Pitchess v. Davis*, 421 U.S. 482, 490 (1975); *Lawson v. Dixon*, 3 F.3d 743, 749 n. 4, (4th Cir. 1993)("[E]xhaustion is not a jurisdictional requirement, but rather arises from interests of comity between the state and federal courts"). Therefore, Petitioner's habeas action is subject to summary dismissal.

RECOMMENDATION

Accordingly, it is recommended that this petition for a writ of habeas corpus be dismissed *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process upon the Respondent. *See Toney v. Gammon*, 79 F3d. 693, 697 (8th Cir. 1996) (a petition may be summarily dismissed if the record clearly indicates that the petitioner's claims are either barred from review or are without merit); *Allen v. Perini*, 424 F.2d 134, 141 (6th Cir. 1970) (federal district courts have duty to screen habeas corpus petitions and eliminate burden placed on respondents caused by ordering an unnecessary answer or return). *Cf.* the AEDPA. Petitioner's attention is directed to the important notice on the following page.



Joseph R. McCrorey
United States Magistrate Judge

September 3, 2009
Columbia, South Carolina

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Court Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. In the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must “only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005).

Specific written objections must be filed within ten (10) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three (3) days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a) & (e). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985).